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CIA Didn't Foresee 'National Revolution' In Iran, Chief Says

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Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner said yesterday that Iran is experiencing "a truly national revolution" that has caught the United States and nearly everyone else by surprise.

Turner said the CIA had been aware of widespread dissidence in Iran stemming from religious, cultural, political and economic forces. "It was like a series of volcanoes bubbling up. But it certainly appeared that no one of them would bubble up so much that the government couldn't control it," he said on "Issues and Answers" (ABC-WJLA).

"What we didn't forecast was that . . . a 78-year-old cleric who had been in exile for 14 years would be the catalyst that would bring these forces together, and that we would have one huge volcano—a truly national revolution."

Turner said the CIA "clearly would like to have done better" in gauging the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's influence and in understanding the resurgence of the Islamic movement. (Khomeini has called for the creation of an Islamic republic in Iran.) But Turner said the strength of the movement was a surprise to everyone, including Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who left Iran Jan. 16 on an indefinite "vacation." The shah was the initial target of the revolution.

"I would suggest even Ayatollah Khomeini didn't realize how well his force was moving along," Turner said.

The CIA must "do a better job at looking at the socio-political happenings in countries," the CIA chief said. "It's not easy. . . . We're not No. 2 (in intelligence gathering). But we're going to try harder."

Turner said he knew of "no other intelligence service that predicted trouble in Iran." Of the Soviets he said: "Particularly because they are a police-state, they felt that the bubbles of discontent would be kept under control. It wasn't until it became clear that the shah's days were numbered that they came out as stridently as they did against the shah's government."

Asked if he thought the shah had a chance to regain power, Turner answered:

"I would want to say that there clearly are widespread differences of opinion inside Iran as to which way the country should go. For me to take a position on one side or the other might be interpreted as attempting to influence those events. . . . We all want this to come out correctly and peacefully in accordance with what the Iranian people want. And I don't want to meddle in that by anything I say."

Turner, whose agency was criticized last year for its information on the situation in Iran, said, "I believe we have very good information today. We are able to keep our decision makers as well informed as possible." He declined to say what effect the upheavals might have on U.S. intelligence-monitoring stations in Iran, which borders on the Soviet Union.

Turner said that if Khomeini forms a government that is stable and has the support of the people, "it's quite possible" that Iran could again become a good U.S. ally. The shah's government turned out not to be a good ally because "it couldn't stay in power," he said.

On other matters, Turner said:

- He doesn't believe there will be a war between China and the Soviet Union. However, he said "a lot of adverse rhetoric" between the leaders of the two countries has created "a dangerous situation."

- The CIA cooperated fully with the FBI and Maryland law enforcement officials in investigating the death of John A. Paisley, a former high-level CIA official whose body was found floating in the Chesapeake Bay Oct. 1. He had a bullet wound in the head.

- Allegations that Paisley was linked to a major CIA intelligence breach are false.

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